ISSN 0712-7774

# CEREBUS

## RICK'S STORY

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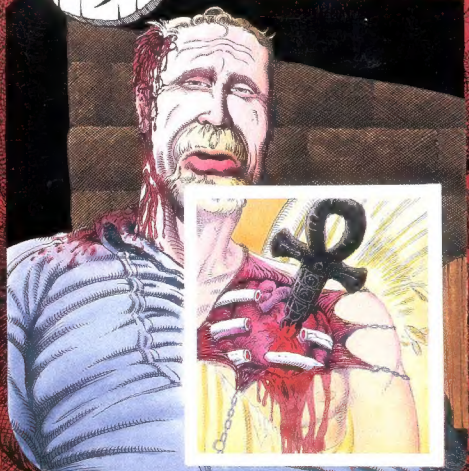

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# E X C E R P T

When she saw him she shrank away with a little cry. As he entered and closed the door she retreated before him into the front room. George followed.

It was twilight outside and the apartment was dusky and sad. The last light fell softly on the standardized furniture and the great gallery of signed photographs of moving-picture people that covered one wall. Her face was white, and as she stared at him she began nervously wringing her hands.

"What's this nonsense, Margaret?" George said, trying to keep any reproach out of his voice. "Do you need money that bad?"

She shook her head vaguely. Her eyes were still fixed on him with a sort of terror; George looked at the floor.

"I suppose this was your brother's idea. At least I can't believe you'd be so stupid." He looked up, trying to preserve the brusque masterly attitude of one talking to a naughty child, but at the sight of her face every emotion except pity left him. "I'm a little tired. Do you mind if I sit down?"

"No."

"I'm a little confused today," said George after a minute. "People seem to have it in for me today."

"Why, I thought" — her voice became ironic in midsentence — "I thought everybody loved you, George."

"They don't."

"Only me?"

"Yes," he said abstractedly.

"I wish it had been only me. But then, of course, you wouldn't have been you."

Suddenly he realized that she meant what she was saying.

"That's just nonsense."

"At least you're here," Margaret went on. "I suppose I ought to be glad of that. And I am. I most decidedly am. I've often thought of you sitting in that chair, just at this time when it was almost dark. I used to make up little one-act plays about what would happen then. Would you like to hear one of them? I'll have to begin by coming over and sitting on the floor at your feet."

Annoyed and yet spellbound, George kept trying desperately to seize upon a word or mood that would turn the subject.

"I've seen you sitting there so often that you don't look a bit more real than your ghost. Except that your hat has squashed your beautiful hair down on one side and you've got dark circles or dirt under your eyes. You look white, too, George. Probably you were on a party last night."

"I was. And I found your brother waiting for me when I got home."

"He's a good waiter, George. He's just out of San Quentin prison, where he's been waiting the last six years."

*continued on last page ...*

CEREBUS
NO. 224 NOVEMBER 1997

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**RICK'S STORY**
•
(Cerebus 220 to Cerebus 231)

MONTHLY
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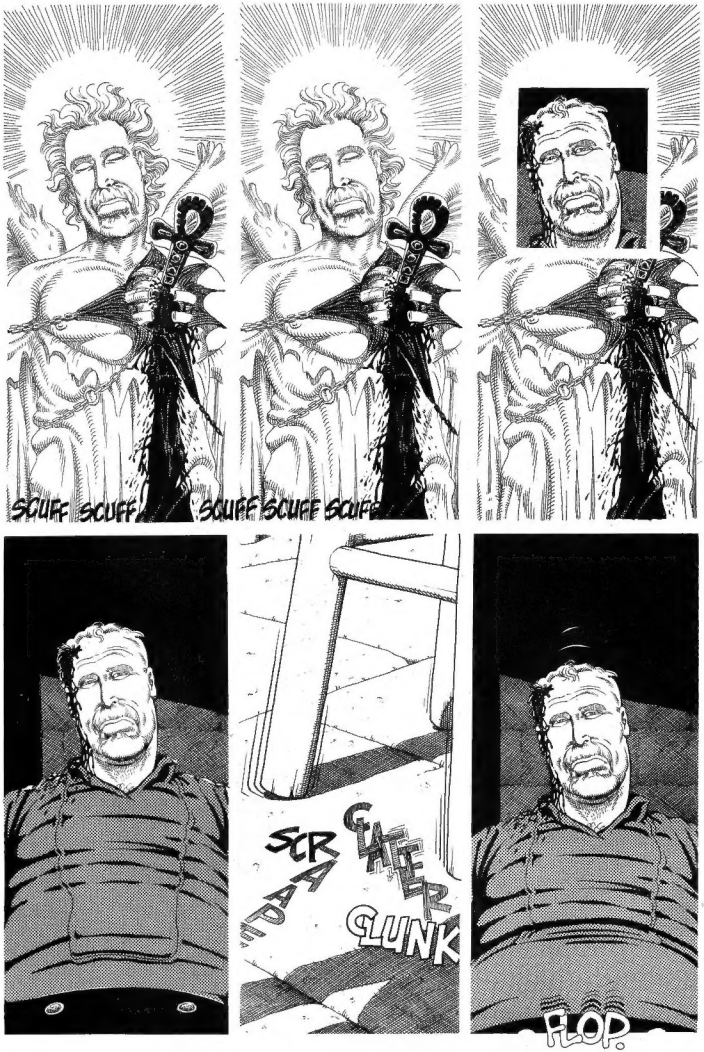
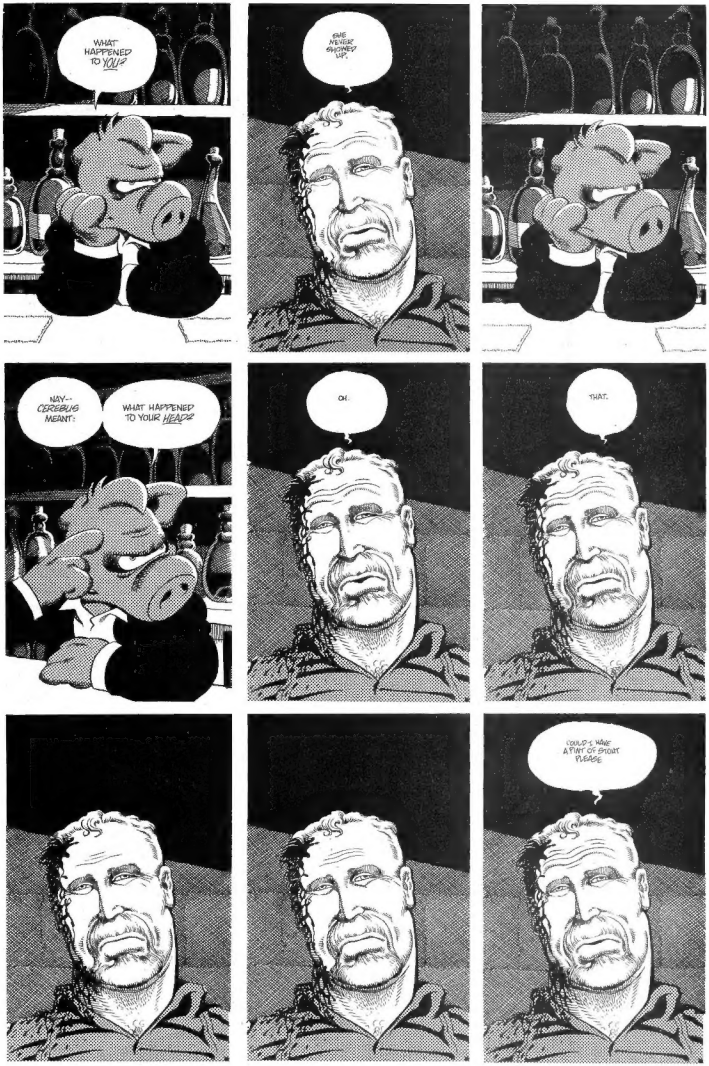
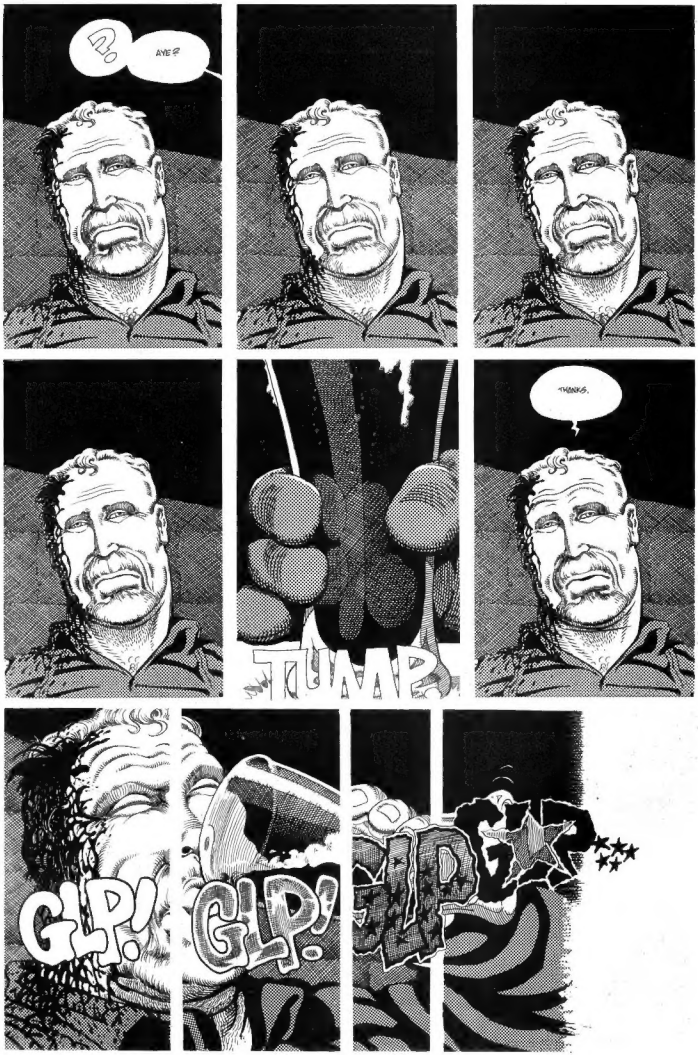
SHE'S JUST TRYING TO MAKE CERBERUS JEALOUS
(IT SEEMS TO BE WORKING!)
(SHUDDUP.)
CERBERUS WILL GET HER BACK
WHAT?!
WAIT! LET CERBERUS FINISH! CERBERUS WILL GET HER BACK TO PUNISH GIRLY-BOY!!
WHAT!?
WAIT! LET CERBERUS FINISH! CERBERUS WILL GET HER BACK TO PUNISH GIRLY-BOY
AND THEN CERBERUS WILL DUMP HER AGAIN TO PUNISH HER!
THAT'S CRAZY!
HOW SO?
"HOW SO?"?!
(HM. "HOW SO?")
(SEE? IT COULD WORK!)
AYE AYE AYE
BUT HOW WILL CERBERUS GET HER BACK?
(CERBERUS WILL--)
(WILL WHAT?)
CERBERUS WILL LET HER MAKE CURTAINS FOR HIS TAVERN
NAY
CERBERUS ALREADY TOLD HER SHE COULD MAKE CURTAINS FOR HIS TAVERN AND ALL IT DID WAS MAKE HER MAD
(AYE. THAT IS TRUE. SHE
?
WHY DID IT MAKE HER MAD?
BECAUSE SHE'S CRAZY THAT'S WHY!
AYE! AYE! AYE!
OTHERWISE WHY WOULD SHE PROVIDE GIRLY-BOY TO CERBERUS?
GOOD POINT
GOOD POINT
SO? HOW DOES CERBERUS GET CRAZY JOANNE TO COME BACK?
CERBERUS HAS TO DO SOMETHING CRAZY...
AYE! AYE! AYE!
(LIKE WHAT?)
CERBERUS COULD SEE HER TO MARRY HIM...!
WHOA! NOT THAT CRAZY!!
OKAY. FORGET CRAZY. WHEN THEY COME IN CERBERUS WILL CHALLENGE GIRLY-BOY TO A GAME OF FIVE BAR GATE
(AYE?)
AYE! AND WHEN CRAZY JOANNE SEES THAT GIRLY-BOY CAN'T EVEN HIT THE NET AND THAT CERBERUS CAN STOP ANY OF GIRLY-BOY'S SHOTS THAT DO HIT THE...
THAT WON'T WORK
CERBERUS DOESN'T KNOW WHY THAT WON'T WORK, BUT
THAT WON'T WORK
AYE AYE AYE
THINK!
THINK THINK THINK THINK
CERBERUS HAS TO FIND A WAY TO SHOW CRAZY JOANNE JUST HOW MUCH OF A LOSER GIRLY-BOY
KLAK-KLAK
KLAK


SCUFF SCUFF
SCUFF SCUFF SCUFF
SCRAAAPE
CLATTER
CLUNK
FLOP


WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?
SHE NEVER SHOWED UP.
NAY-- CEREBUG MEANT:
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR HEAD?
OH.
THAT.
COULD'S HAVE A TINT OF SPORT PLEASE


?
AYE?
THANKS.
THUMP
GLP!
GLP!
GLP!

SEE.
THE WAY CEREBUS LOOKS AT IT -- IT'S A WASTE OF TIME TO THINK ABOUT ANY WOMAN.
UH-HUH
LIKE GOOD OL' VIKTOR SAID -- ANY GUY WHO CHASES AFTER WOMEN IS GOING TO GET WHAT HE DESERVES
UH-HUH
THE WAY CEREBUS LOOKS AT WOMEN (GEEZ)
IS CEREBUS CAN TAKE 'EM
OR LEAVE 'EM
UH-HUH
YOU! (ON THE OTHER HAND) YOU'RE A MESS!
UH-HUH
... AND OVER WHAT?
A WOMAN.
UH-HUH
AND NOT ONLY THAT -- OVER A WOMAN YOU JUST MET?
UH-HUH
WHAT CEREBUS MEANS IS: IT WOULD BE ONE THING IF YOU HAD (YOU KNOW) SLEPT WITH HER A DOZEN OR (SAY) SEVENTY-SEVEN TIMES
UH-HUH
BUT EVEN THEN! GETTING ALL WORKED UP ABOUT IT ISN'T GOING TO DO ANY GOOD.
UH-HUH
IS IT.
UH-HUH
HANH?
NO... IT ISN'T...
YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT IT ISN'T
SEE--
THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE TO BE MORE LIKE CEREBUS
YOU GOTTA BE ABLE T' TAKE 'EM OR
KLIK KLAK

RICK!
WHAT HAPPENED?
ZIP
OH. RIGHT.
AS IF YOU. CARE.
DID. YOU. HIT HIM ?
DID CEREBUS
YOU SEE WHAT THEY'RE LIKE?
HANH?
YOU SEE?
HAH!
IN YOUR DREAMS, SISTER!-- RICK AND CEREBUS DON'T HAVE ANY SECRETS FROM EACH OTHER---
RIGHT RICK?
WOULD YOU EXCUSE US PLEASE

UHh.
SEE!
WELL, FINE.
GREAT.
NOW GET ME SOME ALCOHOL
AND A CLEAN.
CLOTH.
WHAT FOR.
"WHAT..."
"FOR"?
DOINK
NG
SO I CAN CLEAN RICK'S WOUND!
THAT'S "WHAT FOR"
WELL MAYBE RICK DOESN'T WANT HIS WOUND CLEANED
DID YOU EVER THINK OF THAT?
HANH!?
WELL, OF COURSE HE WANTS HIS WOUND CLEANED!
DON'T BE STUPID--
HEY! WHO ARE YOU CALLING "STUPID"?
RICK?

I'M GOING TO CLEAN YOUR WOOOUND
O-KAAAY?
SEE!
NOW GET ME SOME ALCOHOL AND A CLEAN.
CLOTH.
LISTEN!... RICK!... WOUNDS ALWAYS HEAL BETTER WITH NICE BIG SCABS ON 'EM! LIKE THIS ONE TIME... CEREBUS WAS GOING TO
NOW.
AWRIGHT AWRIGHT
JUST HOLD YER WATER A MINUTE
(I'ERYIN' OUT LOUD)
YOU POOR DEEEAR...
YOU AREN'T DIZZY...
OR NAUSEOUS ARE YOU...?

HERE!
TUMP
PLAP
THANK YOU.
NOW, I'LL GO & RINSE THIS IS GOING TO...
I SAID: A CLEAN. CLOTH.
AND?!
THIS. IS A BAR. RAG.
SO!?
IT SITS IN SOAPY WATER ALL DAY...
WHAT COULD BE CLEANER THAN THAT?
GRIND
TITCH
PLAP!
HEY!
?
RIP
RIP
RIP

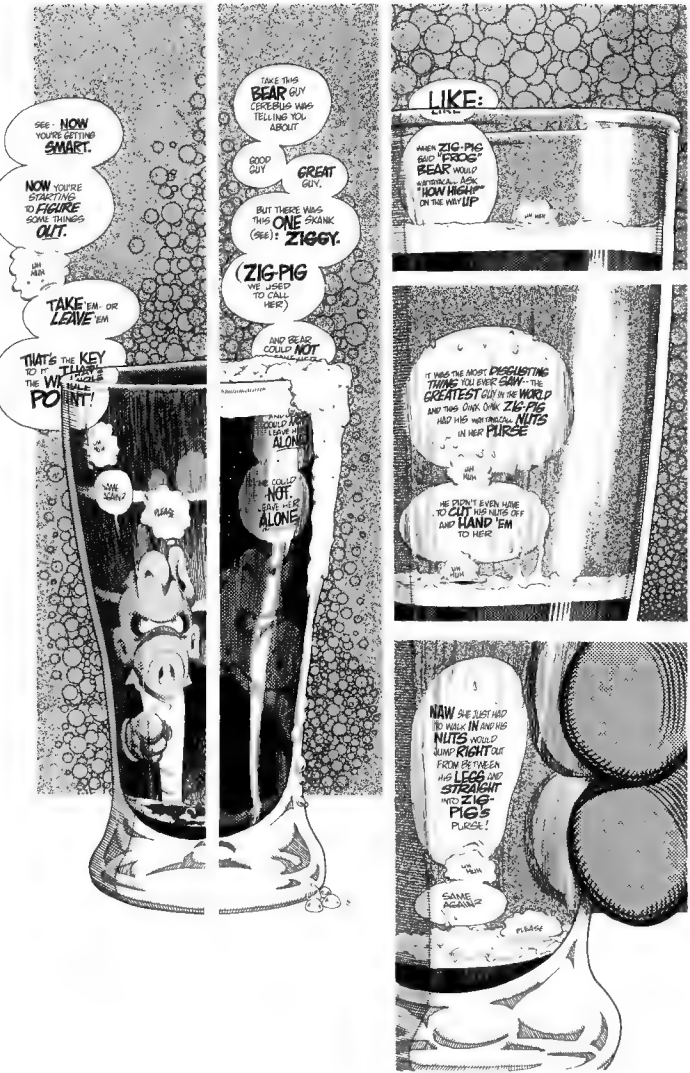
NOW R. RICK THIS IS GOING TO STING A BIT.
OKAY-Z
OOPS!
HOLD STILL-WILL YA
HOLD
RICK. HOLD STILL. I MEAN IT.
THEEEERE
THERE - YOU SEEE?
THIS NOT-SO
BAAAAD
HMMM?
WIDE
DAB DAB WIPE
RIP
RAPE
SLASH
GOUGE
THERE!
AWWLLL DONE
THANK GOODNESS IT WASN'T NEARLY AS BAD AS IT LOOKED
(MOST OF IT WAS JUST DRIED BLOOD)
TWITCH.

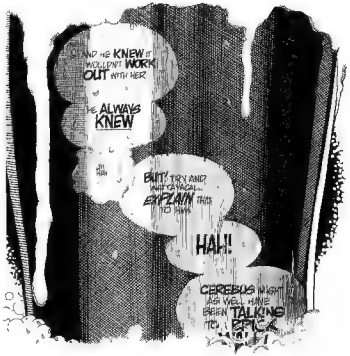
ANYWAY, I CAME IN TO EXPLAIN WHY I NEVER SHOWED UP LAST NIGHT
BOB, MY MOTHER CAME DOWN WITH A FEVER
OH, YEAH. RIGHT.
MY MOTHER CAME DOWN WITH A FEVER.
AND I HAD TO STAY HOME TO TAKE CARE OF HER
SURE SURE SURE
21...CK? I'M REALLY REALLY SORRY
YOU!? SORRY!? HAH!
I. AM. SORRY.
YOU COULD'VE SHOWED UP
IF YOU REALLY WANTED TO
YEAH? AND JUST WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO? ...

LEAVE MY SICK MOTHER HOME ALL ALONE? JUST BECAUSE I PROMISED SOME GUY
"SOME."
"GUY"?!
YOU SEE WHAT THEY'RE LIKE?
HAH!?
YOU SEE?
SO THAT'S ALL RICK IS TO YOU, HUH?
"SOME"
SNAP
"GUY"?!
RICK
MY MOTHER HAS A FEVER
RICK.
IF YOU LET HER GET AWAY WITH THAT?
NEXT TIME IT'LL BE: "MY GRANDMOTHER HAD RINGWORM"
THEN: "MY UNCLE HAD GOUT"
PRETTY SOON HER WHOLE DAMN FAMILY WILL HAVE ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE--
AND SHE'LL NEVER SHOW UP.

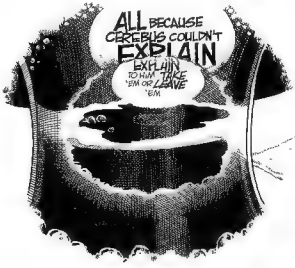
YOU KNOW WHAT CERBERUS MEANS
I'M NOT SURE I SEE. NO.
YOUR MOTHER REALLY HAD A FEVER!?
ARE YOU CALLING ME A LIAR.
HMM
YOU ARE... AREN'T YOU.
YOU'RE CALLING ME A LIAR.
TWIT!
I THINK I BETTER LEAVE
SNATCH
I THINK I BETTER LEAVE...
RIGHT. NOW.

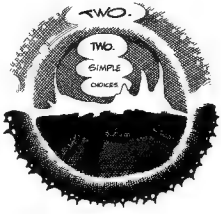
HA!
WELL DON'T LET US STOP YOU!
STOMP STOMP STOM
KLIK-KLAK SLAM
SLUT
YOU
YOU REALLY THINK SHE LIED?
OF COURSE SHE LIED.
THEY ALL LIE
OH


SEE: NOW YOU'RE GETTING SMART.
NOW YOU'RE STARTING TO FIGURE SOME THINGS OUT.
UH HUH
TAKE 'EM OR LEAVE 'EM
THAT'S THE KEY TO IT THE WHOLE POINT!
TAKE THIS BEAR GUY CEREBELUS WAS TELLING YOU ABOUT
GOOD GUY
GREAT GUY.
BUT THERE WAS THIS ONE SKANK (SEE): ZIGGY.
(ZIG-PIG WE USED TO CALL HER)
AND BEAR COULD NOT
ANY SHOULD HAVE LEAVE HER ALONE
SHE COULD NOT. LEAVE HER ALONE
UH HUH
SAME AGAIN?
PLEASE
LIKE:
WHEN ZIG-PIG GAVE "FROG" BEAR WOULD HYSTERICALLY ASK "HOW HIGH?" ON THE WAY UP
UH HUH
IT WAS THE MOST DISGUSTING THING YOU EVER SAW - THE GREATEST GUY IN THE WORLD AND THIS DARK DARK ZIG-PIG HAD HIS HYSTERICAL NUTS IN HER PURSE
UH HUH
HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO CUT HIS NUTS OFF AND HAND 'EM TO HER
UH HUH
NAW SHE JUST HAD TO WALK IN AND HIS NUTS WOULD JUMP RIGHT OUT FROM BETWEEN HIS LEGS AND STRAIGHT INTO ZIG-PIG'S PURSE!
UH HUH
SAME AGAIN?
PLEASE

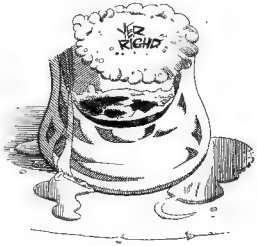

AND HE KNEW IT SHOULDN'T WORK OUT WITH HER
HE ALWAYS KNEW
BUT!! TRY AND MUSTER UP THE COURAGE TO EXPLAIN THIS TO HIM!!
HA!!
CEREBUS MIGHT HAVE WELL HAVE BEGUN TALKING TO A BRICK WALL!

BELKSTEIN AT CEREBUS' HEAD
IF CEREBUS HADN'T'VE DUCKED
CEREBUS COULD'VE BEEN KILLED!
KILLED!


ALL BECAUSE CEREBUS COULDN'T EXPLAIN
EXPLAIN TO HIM TAKE 'EM OR LEAVE 'EM

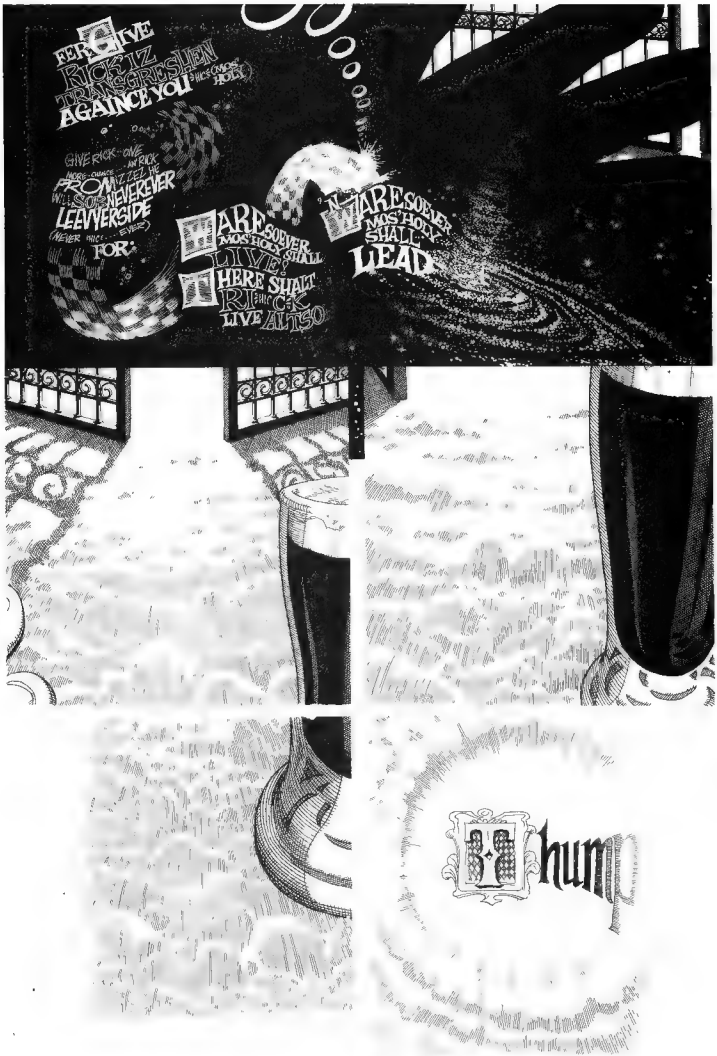

TWO.
TWO.
SIMPLE
CHOICES

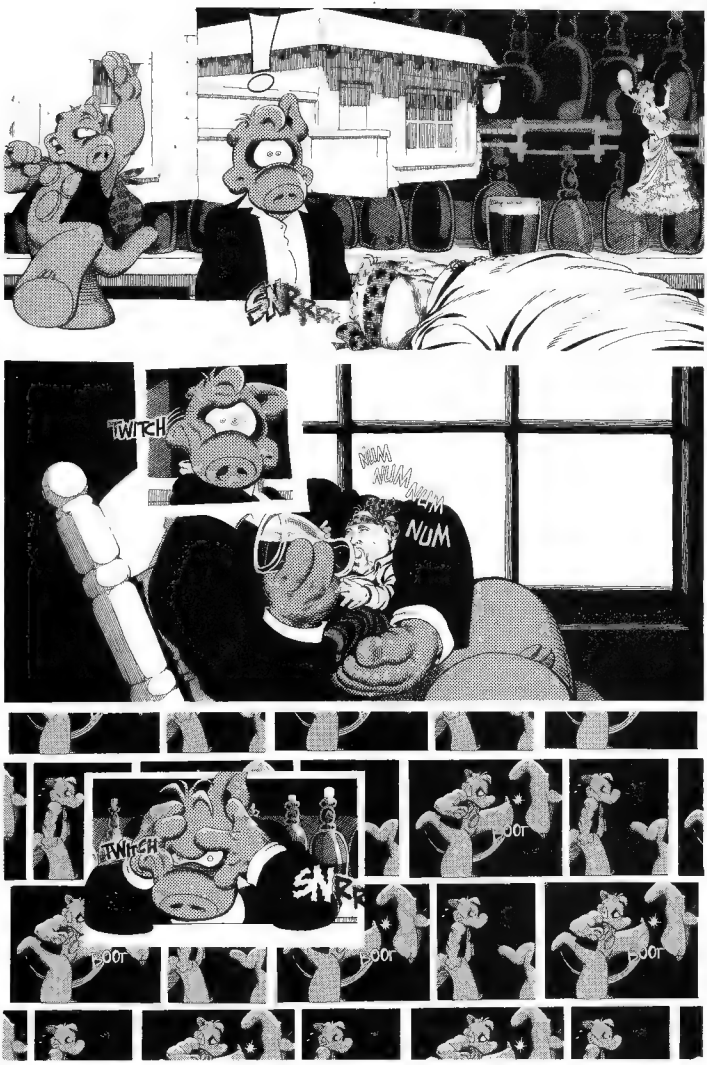
THUMP


YER RIGHT!

WHY COULDN'T RICK SEE IT BEFORE?
EVEN IF SHE'D SHOWN DUP
SHE'D'VE'S ENNUF LEAVING RICK ENNY WAY!
SHE'D'USSENN NUFF LEAVING
THEY ALL LEEV RIGHT?
THEY ALL LEEV... N' THEY ALL LIE!
RIGHT?
RIGHT
WELL NO MORE FER RICK... BRUTHER
PLEASE

RICK HAS BEEN LEF PER TH LAS TIME
GOAD RICK YOU
ALSO
RICK WUZZA CONFESHUN TA MAKE
I?
MOBS HOLT RICK WUZ GOINA ASK TH HARLOT TA MARRY HIM
AN' RICK WAS GOING TO LEAVE YOU!
RICK HIDEZ IZ EYES BUH FOUR YER WRATH
RICK HAS BETRAYED YOU! YOU WHOOAZ GUIDED RICK ON THE TROO PATH:
LIV:
GO ON
AN'
BEAD ID
SKRAM


FERGIVE
RICKIZ
TRANSGRISSIEN
AGAINCE YOU
GIVE RICK ONE
MORE CHANCE
FROM
LEEVVERSIDE
FOR
HARE SOEVER
MOS HOLY SHALL
LIVE
HERE SHALT
RICK
LIVE ALTSO
HARE SOEVER
MOS HOLY
SHALL
LEAD
hump


SNRRR
TWITCH
NUM NUMM NUMM NUM
TWITCH
SNRR
BOOF
BOOF
BOOF
BOOF

# AARDVARK COMMENT

*Remember a couple of issues back when I printed the letter with a list of "mama's boys" and said that if I got four responses I would sit dawn and actually write the response I've been writing in my head for the last while? Well:*

Dave Sim,

William Faulkner, as portrayed in Joseph Blotner's biography, was a mama's boy.

Of those I have heard but have no proof.

Alfred Hitchcock

Edgar AllAn Poe

H.P. Lovecraft

My mind is drawing a blank.

Anyways — I appreciate the articles on *Comics and the Mass Medium* and the correspondence entitled *From Hell*. Both were very interesting to say the least.

Once I find those issues and reread them, I plan to send another letter regarding the faults I finid in those said essays.

Tony Cooper

P.S. Thought of above articles as my brain rotted watching *Spawn*. Seems I'll never learn.

*That's one.*

❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁

Dave,

So far I'm enjoying *Rick's Story* more than *Guys*. I liked the touch of *Cerebus* having the crates stacked behind the bar for height purposes…

I wonder if David Groenwegen may be right… F.D.R. was certainly one, Brian Epstein (oops! had him already), George S. Kaufman, Robert Benchley… but then again, Buster Keaton, Theodore Roosevelt, Abe Lincoln, J.F.K., U.S. Grant, and Marvin Gaye were (as far as I know) not.

I hope more readers write in, I'm dying to see how this fits in with the rest of your infamous "void/light" philosophy.

Yours,

Alex Robinson

*That's two.*

❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁

Dave,

Oh, and David Groenwegen missed out the top pick. Jesus Christ, Dave.

Michael Mooney

N.B.: I'm working on the mini-max principle: short letter, long answer.

*And that (I'm sure we'll all agree) is quite a three. One more to go.*

❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁

Dear Dave:

Use all your well-learned Politics or I'll lay your soul to waste.

David Hayes

Third Stone From the Sun

*Which is why I definitely will not be including Mr. Mooney's top pick if and when I get a fourth for this little bridge game.*

*Say, while we're all just waiting for the fourth shoe to drop, here's an interesting one from our old friend Stephen Holland of Page 45 (I mean we've been friends a long time, Stephen; you don't look a day over twenty-two — seriously):*

❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁

Dear Dave,

Hugely enjoying the back of *Cerebus* right now, poor Eddie — very, very funny.

The second part sparked something very odd in me whilst Alan was talking about The All That Is (page 10, bottom of left-hand column). Since it was a delivery day, I was relieved to discover the effect but fleeting, but all the same… I'd like to suspect Alan of arranging that passage as a mischievous incantation: a time bomb for the (un)collective 32 Thousand Eyes Roach, catalysing a Mexican wave of revelation (or, at the very least, mindfuck). And since I'd like to believe it, I shall.

But the (typically irrelevant) aside that provoked me into faxing a quick note was your reference to Blake as the first self-publisher.

Because it strikes me that the comic-book industry right now lies in precisely that flux of the late 18th and early 19th century, when the Romantics emerged from a period of literary sterility and corrupt political tyranny to proclaim the virtues of individual awareness, insight, and interpretation over traditional, classical reserve, and, in the case of the pamphlet writers, to fight against stamp duty, governmental censorship, and — if that failed — governmental persecution then prosecution, for their right to free speech. All struggled against the stubbornly resistant Augustan dogma, as represented by many but not all (Lamb, for example) of their contemporary reviewers, with its willfully blinkered, self-limiting worship and insistence upon the traditional form and content (That Which Has Gone Before, Has Served Us All Well, And Must Be Adhered To For Ever And Ever Amen) for Art as they strove to maintain the status quo. All this during a surge of public interest (from a wider range of demographic groups) in

literature as a whole, and in particular the new genres (rural life, everyday life, childhood, fantasy, travel — none of which were deemed Appropriate subjects for Art) being explored by this new generation of writers. It was, in short, a progressive time, politically, socially, and in terms of its literature.

Each one of these elements has a contemporary comic-book parallel I doubt I need to spell out, even to the extent that we (if I might presume to include myself, perhaps as a pamphleteer?) take our hope and inspiration from that which we see in France (the rest of Europe and Japan) where the revolution has already occurred.

Stephen Holland
Page 45
9 Market Street
Nottingham NG1 6HY
England

*I agree with your sentiments, Stephen — except for the France and Europe and Japan part. Just my personal prejudice (I'm sure), but I hope the "revolution" — if and when it occurs in the English-speaking world — has a little more content than I find exhibited by the "all sizzle and no steak" work that I've seen in the European and Japanese material. Hmm. Is it even possible for something that is more steak than sizzle to participate in such a revolution (since content has become notoriously unpopular in the late twentieth century)? Or would the success of a handful of steaks conjure up such a proliferation of sizzles that it would render the possibility of future steaks rising to prominence too distant and remote to risk chancing (what a terrible sentence!)? My own current view is that such a sudden "revolution" is a) distinctly possible, b) will occur — if it occurs — in an unforeseen fashion, c) will occur in such a way as to make all of us old-timers long for the "good ol' days" when no one knew we were here or (for the most part) cared what we were doing.*

*Say, as long as everyone's head is throbbing:*

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Dear Dave,

This was to be my last full day in Edinburgh for the Easter vacation. So, I get back from the pub at five in the a.m. after drinking an unfortunate eight pints, largely at the expense of my friend Mr. Ross Aitken, and I'm still drunk at nine-thirty when I'm rudely rousted out of bed by my co-conspirator at college, Mr. Wray, who announces that he won't arrive in Durham till eleven p.m. tomorrow, so there's no point in my going down till Thursday. This is extremely fortunate, since I'm unable to do anything before two p.m. other than to lie in bed and feel thick cobwebs wrapping themselves around my shrunken brain in successive layers of incoherence. I need an extra day to get my metaphoric shit together and — lo! — it is provided. The Goddess is a wonderful chess player.

Synchronicity. Like being deep into "The Iron Of Astronauts" and picking up the latest issue of *Cerebus* only to find the Appolonian attempt at Ascension quoted there in sky-searing prose on the inside of the cover. By two a.m., my hangover has largely abated and so I put a Bell & Sebastian tape in my walkman, roll a smoke, and go for a walk outside. I'd spent the afternoon bathing and rereading the text sections from *Reads*, and I was struck sharply by how much I've grown since first reading them two years ago. Everything seemed so sharply realized, and, if I find myself more surely convinced than before that I don't agree with your essential thesis (which is not the subject of this letter), I can also see exactly where you draw the substance of your ideas from, and it mirrors a lot of my own experience of the world. So I'm out walking and mulling this over in my head once again and mixing it with my own fears about Art and the (mis)directions into which it appears to be being channelled these days when suddenly my gaze is drawn to the skies overhead. And there, right there, the full moon is shining her full reflected visage down on the Earth and it's directed *right at me*. There is a thick and perceptible bank of low-lying atmospheric moisture in the sky tonight, and the overall effect is blurred, her mare barely visible as dark stains on a luminescent opaline surface, and just then the band plays these exact words:

Goodbye,
Said the Hero in this story;
It is mightier than swords.
I could kill you, sure, but
I could only make you
Cry with these words.

Synchronicity. Like standing next to you at a urinal in Nottingham last year and discussing the myth that you no longer smoke marijuana (all stories are true) and you describing your conversation with Alan all those years ago when he was first coming to grips with his ideas for *From Hell*. And then, reading in the first Dialogue about his notion of a "high-altitude pass" and thinking that it was akin to Mailer's approach in *A Fire On The Moon*, his so-called "scientific approach" to the problem of Ascension and coming to realize that I have adopted the exact same structure in planning the role-playing game that I run in Durham: three consecutive campaigns. Phase one (last year) was the high-altitude pass: define the world, lay out the major forces and powers, shake the players out of their conventional notions of bashing monsters and accumulating treasure. Phase two (this year) the big story — Dragon's pawn. Pun intended, a metaphor based on Chess. The White Queen has been taken, the Black Queen is yet to be revealed, and, writing this now, it occurs to me that the Kings are totally divorced from the structure. It is the manipulations of the Queens which are at the root of the broader actions taken by each side; it is they who manufacture the webs of deceit and treachery through which our young heroes have been maneuvering this past year. The Queens are brides to the Logrus (chaos — or maybe Kaos, the formlessness which existed before Creation). Widely held, thanks largely to Ovid, to be a great, homogeneous mixture of all the elements of existence — like 20th-century culture — but originally conceived by Hesiod as merely being the Void. The Kings, by way of contrast, are solitary figures and grand. Thinkers. Theirs is the power of the Pattern (Order, reason, origin of structure in the universe — the Male Light). And next year, Phase Three (The Dragon's layers). I have long been convinced that my goal was to achieve the "deeper" connection that Alan was

talking about in the first Dialogue: to get into their minds and their lives and permanently stamp an imprint on their thinking — no, to help them to consciously stamp a permanent imprint on their own thinking.

I had a good, albeit occasional, friend at college this year, a freshman named Dave. The easiest way to conceive of this guy is that he is the nearest "real-world" equivalent of Jack from the Invisibles. So, we're sitting in his college room getting canned one night last term. I told him about light-cones, four vector motia through the shape (barely conceivable) of space-time, and we just kind of sat there thinking about what a cool reality this was to perceive, and we're both really getting into it, and he looks up through slit-like eyes, kind of puffy behind his thick spectacles, and says to me: "Life's a game. That's it. That's always been my philosophy." Dave's been removed from this game, unfortunately, and he may not be coming back to Durham at all. He lived in his own head and defied conventional "reality" to batter down the door, and they came and took him away. I tried calling him over the holidays and ended up listening to this polite, synthetic, robot-like female voice repeating over and over again that that number does not exist and I should please check it carefully and dial again. BT had not charged me for this call. I can only conclude that the Lioigor got him.

I watched *The Crucible* recently. The effect is that Daniel Day Lewis and Winona Rider have been transported back through time and the acting of every other character is superb. Lewis doesn't really hold it until right at the end, when he realizes that he is going to have to die, and then something in him seems to change, and I just sat there transfixed whilst they marched him up to the gallows. Given that the means of verification for witchcraft in the play is a chorus of conspiratorial young girls who coordinate their theatrical wails and shrieks to the total terror and conviction of their superstitious New England townsmates and that they effectively dictate to the male patriarchal Witch hunters who is to be condemned, you'd have to conclude that they are Kevillists. And given that Rider's motivation in destroying Lewis is her sexual desire for him and she can't believe that he will sacrifice his life for a principle…well, all I'm saying is that anyone who's with this stuff should see it. You even get to watch the youngest Witch hunter move towards becoming a hard, gem-like flame towards the end.

At some point in the last year, I came to the realization that a career in research physics is not for me. My next destination in academia will be a Masters in the philosophy of the mind. And my ultimate destination is to write, no matter what. As yet, I am unsure where my priorities lie amongst comics, novels, or trying to precipitate the burgeoning renaissance which has been threatening in role-playing for some time. When I do decide, I'll send you a copy. Recently, physicists have come to believe that Information plays as real and significant a role in the structure of the universe as do Matter and Energy, that Information can be an inherent property of objects or systems — nay, that it has to be so. Well, if that is true, then I'm sure you don't need me to outline the implications for synchronicity, for Mailer's conception of the Dream. If there is to be an additional physics of Information, a set of rules and protocols for the interactions of facts, decisions, and ideas, then need it be mediated by matter or energy? Or will we find that Information can directly act to restructure reality, to send its resonant Patterns out through our world? Nature is largely probabilistic in the fine analysis anyway, and it has long been my conception of God that, insofar as He directly influences reality at all, this is where He does the fine work of the exercise of His power.

A parenthetical question: How come so little mention is made of Grant Morrison? For all that he has whored himself to Vertigo Horse and allowed them to leach a measure of the vitality out of *The Invisibles* (particularly noticeable in the new, slicker, sex 'n' violence-fuelled issues), he is still the man who wrote the first true post-modernist superhero comic (the very excellent *Flex Mentallo)*, the man who wrote *Arkham Asylum* to "be a model of a human mind," the man who, in *The Mystery Play*, penned the words:

I think everything that happens in the vicinity of a murder has some significance: The flight of birds, the shape of the clouds, the positions of the stars, items discarded by passers-by. Nothing can be overlooked… Science is beginning to realize that the universe exists as a vast network of interdependent connections. The smallest part affects the largest.

I mean, it's not as poetic as "Find me a dead cloud…" or as striking a metaphor as interconnecting chessboards, but I think you could say that he's addressing much the same point here.

I could go on for hours. I won't even broach the Brief History of my Father which I had intended for this missive, nor comments on *Reads* (belated now and irrelevant to the significance of the original work regardless), nor my dissertation on Role-playing as a potential form of Art. But I will take the time to say a belated thank-you: In Nottingham, you bought me a whole bunch of drinks, and at no point did you say, "Listen, kid, I want to talk to Paul and Gary about serious independent-comics stuff, so run along now." So, much belated gratitude for generosity and respect tendered, and the next round is on me.

And one final piece of flattery: I recently made a list of authors whom I've read who have the unmistakable stamp of greatness. It reads like this: Hemingway, Kafka, Mailer, Cormac McCarthy, Tolkien, and Philip K. Dick. I've not read enough Joyce or Miller yet to be sure, and I'm just starting Pynchon with *Gravity's Rainbow*, but I reckon they're shoe-ins. After about a whole second of thought I came to the conclusion that I would definitely rank Moore and Sim in this class. And there isn't one above it.

And to all a good night.

Robert HD Ahrens

*Always nice to hear from you, Robert. Thanks for putting me in with such superb company*

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Dear Dave,

Regarding "the slippery slope to L-Ron-Hubbard-Land," I resent that. I've been a Scientologist for 15 years, and it's made me 100 times the man and artist I was. And the same goes for many of my friends.

Back off, you know nothing about it.

Love,
Eolake Stobblehouse

*I'm not sure* any *of us* knows *anything about* anything, *Eolake. Which is one of the reasons that I'm such an advocate of the open exchange of opinions. In* my *opinion, L. Ron Hubbard represents a "slippery slope for writers" dealing with fantastic themes (fantastic in the sense of fantasy) in their writing. It seems only sensible to* me *to caution young writers that they are apt to see things in connection with their work that could lead them to erroneous and self-destructive conclusions; and that (in my view — and evidently Alan's as well) it is far wiser to err on the side of disbelieving in those things having any significance outside of the individual writer than to err on the side of believing in or attaching any significance to those things.*

*I apologize for any bruise you might have sustained in the process of my using L. Ron Hubbard as my example of the latter. I could just as easily have used Philip K. Dick.*

*continued*

# FROM COVER

"Then it was his idea?"

"We cooked it up together. I was going to China on my share."

"Why was I the victim?"

"That seemed to make it realer. Once I thought you were going to fall in love with me five years ago."

The bravado suddenly melted out of her voice and it was still light enough to see that her mouth was quivering.

"I've loved you for years," she said — "since the first day you came West, and walked into the old Realart Studio. You were so brave about people, George. Whoever it was, you walked right up to them and tore something aside as if it was in your way and began to know them. I tried to make love to you, just like the rest, but it was difficult. You drew people right up close to you and held them there, not able to move either way."

"This is all entirely imaginary," said George, frowning uncomfortably, "and I can't control —"

"No, I know. You can't control charm. It's simply got to be used. You've got to keep your hand in if you have it, and go through life attaching people to you that you don't want. I don't blame you. If you only hadn't kissed me the night of the Mayfair dance. I suppose it was the champagne."

George felt as if a band which had been playing for a long time in the distance had suddenly moved up and taken a station beneath his window. He had always been conscious that things like this were going on around him. Now that he thought of it, he had always been conscious that Margaret loved him, but the faint music of these emotions in his ear had seemed to bear no relation to actual life. They were phantoms that he had conjured up out of nothing; he had never imagined their actual incarnations. At his wish they should die inconsequently away.

"You can't imagine what it's been like," Margaret continued after a minute. "Things you've just said and forgotten, I've put myself asleep night after night remembering — trying to squeeze something more out of them. After that night you took me to the Mayfair other men didn't exist for me any more. And there were others, you know — lots of them. But I'd see you walking along somewhere about the lot, looking at the ground and smiling a little, as if something very amusing had just happened to you, the way you do. And I'd pass you and you'd look up and really smile: 'Hello, darling!' 'Hello darling' and my heart would turn over. That would happen four times a day."

George stood up and she, too, jumped up quickly.

"Oh, I've bored you," she cried softly. "I might have known I'd bore you. You want to go home. Let's see — is there anything else? Oh, yes; you might as well have those letters."

Taking them out of a desk, she took them to a window and identified them by a rift of lamplight.

"They're really beautiful letters. They'd do you credit. I suppose it was pretty stupid, as you say, but it ought to teach you a lesson about — about signing things or something." She tore the letters small and threw them in the wastebasket: "now go on," she said.

"Why must I go now?"

For the third time in twenty-four hours sad and uncontrollable tears confronted him.

"Please go!" she cried angrily — "or stay if you like. I'm yours for the asking. You know it. You can have any woman you want in the world by just raising your hand. Would I amuse you?"

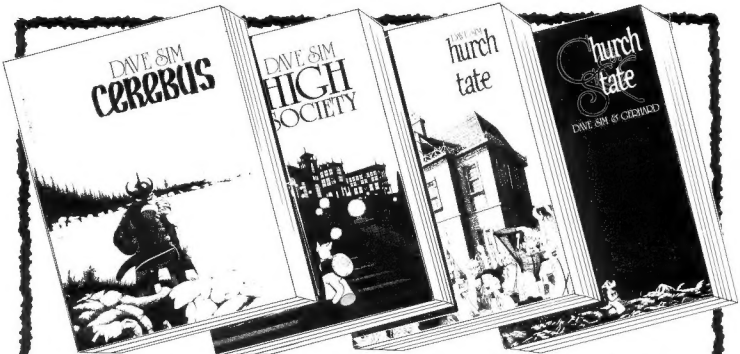
"Margaret —"

"Oh, go on then." She sat down and turned her face away. "After all, you'll begin to look silly in a minute. You wouldn't like that, would you? So get out."

George stood there helpless, trying to put himself in her place and say something that wouldn't be priggish, but nothing came.

He tried to force down his personal distress, his discomfort, his vague feeling of scorn, ignorant of the fact that she was watching him and understanding it all and loving the struggle in his face. Suddenly his own nerves gave way under the strain of the past twenty-four hours and he felt his eyes grow dim and his throat tighten. He shook his head helplessly. Then he turned away — still not knowing that she was watching him and loving him until she thought her heart would burst with it — and went out to the door.

Last Issue's Excerpt:
Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*

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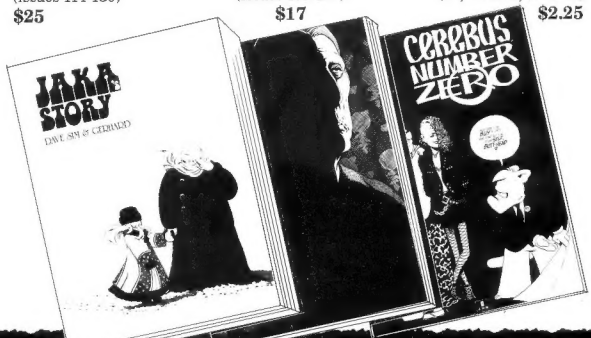


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